

THE

TV
WEEK

Hollywood
INTERVIEW



By Jenny Cooney

FLUBBER

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ROBIN WILLIAMS has a lot in common with *Flubber*, the flying rubber substance he invents as an absent-minded professor in his new hit family comedy.

He's constantly changing, always unpredictable and all over the place.

He may answer your questions in all seriousness, and he can be sweet with his approach to the business and his devotion to his family. But he is just as likely to go off on a tangent that looks like he has been possessed by the comedy gods and has no control over what comes out of his mouth. Except that it's always funny and never boring!

He is earning rave reviews for his role in the soon-to-be-released drama *Good Will Hunting* — playing a therapist who helps a young boy (Matt Damon). But it is his eye-catching role as Professor Phillip Brainard in the updated version of the 1961 Disney classic *The Absent-Minded Professor* that has helped *Flubber* beat the much-hyped *Alien* sequel to the top box-office spot in the U.S.

"I didn't make *Flubber* thinking this is my great offering to the world, but it is a fun movie and kids are touched by it," he says. "That's what it's all about."

One of the appealing aspects of the film, he adds, was the opportunity to play a teacher.

"I have a great fascination with science and my brother teaches physics and chemistry,"

THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL WORLD OF ROBIN WILLIAMS

He stars as an absent-minded professor in his latest film. And warm, witty Williams isn't so far off himself ...

says the 45-year-old, who was nominated for an Oscar for his role as the inspiring teacher in *Dead Poets Society*.

"I have a fascination with the character of the absent-minded professor, because he's the type of guy who can explore the edges of the universe, but sometimes not know where his own shoes are!" Robin says.

It should come as no surprise, then, to learn from Robin that his wife — producer Marsha Williams — complains about his absent-mindedness.

"The weird thing is I have a kind of combination of absent-mindedness and compulsiveness," he says.

"In terms of computers, I can literally spend days on-line.

"While I'm doing it, I forget everything else and suddenly remember I have a family! My wife grounds me, but I do get vague sometimes and she does get mad at me for that."

Unlike his industry peers on the Hollywood A-list, Robin will often appear in films that can't pay him the megabucks.

Flubber is certainly not a big blockbuster, nor is *Good Will Hunting*. And he recently worked for scale — which means virtually nothing — in Woody Allen's new comedy, *Deconstructing Harry*.

"You can't keep hitting them for those salaries and still do a small movie," he says.

"I keep telling my agent to keep my salary where it is,

because if you set it up to always only do big movies, you're going to miss a lot of extraordinary things. I don't want to be in that category."



Movie world

10 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT MADEAD ROBIN

When Robin told his father he wanted to become an actor, his dad said: "That's very good, son, but I think you should have welding as your back-up profession".

Robin says: "I had a troubled relationship with a cold and authoritarian father. I was very shy and quiet. I remember being called a leprechaun and dwarf in the sixth grade. I would go home crying."

At Redwood High School in Tiburon, California, Robin was voted "Least Likely To Succeed".

Robin, who has played child-like characters in *Hook*, *Toys*, *Jumanji* and *Jack*, says it's time to "grow up". He quips: "I keep telling myself, 'You're not a child any more, Robin, you're a big, furry man'."

Fran Drescher (below), who appeared with Robin in *Jack*, claims he's the "hairiest beast" she's ever touched. She also co-starred with Robin in *Cadillac Man*.

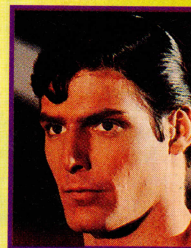
Robin accepted a nominal salary of \$100,000 to lend his voice to Aladdin and had a row with the producer, Disney, over the use of his voice to sell merchandise. The film generated \$850 million in profits and Disney bought him a Picasso as a peace offering.

Robin has been in Australia this week to promote *Flubber*, but his main reason for heading *Down Under* is to take his family on a sight-seeing expedition.

Robin believes laughter is the best medicine. When he visited quadriplegic Christopher Reeve (right), in hospital, he appeared as the Russian doctor he played in *Nine Months*. Christopher laughed.

Robin had no trouble playing a role in *The Birdcage*, a film about a family where both parents are men. "I grew up in the most gay neighborhoods of San Francisco, so I've seen everything," he says.

The Williams family lives in an attractive but modestly sized house in San Francisco. It has a huge toy castle in the garden.



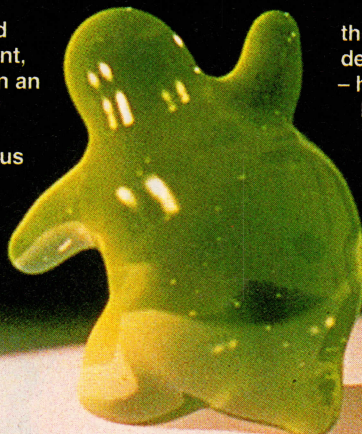
WHAT IS FLUBBER?

ROBIN'S professor and his flying-robot assistant, WEEBO, are working on an idea for a revolutionary new source of energy.

He creates a miraculous goo that, when applied to any object - cars, bowling balls, people - allows them to fly

through the air at great speeds, defying gravity. It looks like rubber - hence its name, flubber.

It may seem real on screen, but Robin says most of the inventions were added later using computer-generated imagery from George Lucas' Industrial Light And Magic company (ILM).



● Robin Williams (above) as eccentric inventor Professor Brainard, coming to grips with his creation, Flubber. And left, with his wife, producer Marsha, and six-year-old son Cody; and (below left, inset) with his eight-year-old daughter, Zoe.

